Sensitive Topics Policy

Updated June 2026

SEEDS operates as a Pennsylvania non-profit corporation with federal, 501(c)(3) tax status. An entity voluntarily seeks 501(c)(3)charitable-purposes status and the associated benefits. The 501(c)(3) charitable-purposes status limits SEEDS' lobbying, political, and candidate activity. For 501(c)(3) purposes, the IRS broadly defines lobbying.

Furthermore, taking an official public position, as an organization, on sensitive topics may carry benefits and risks. A position may clearly communicate the organization's views or perspectives. A position places the "weight" of the organization behind the topic or position. The position may provide benefits such as supporting the views of its supporters, opening new funding opportunities, and identifying new, affiliated partners.

However, a position may also carry risks to the organization. A position may alienate traditional partners, foreclose funding sources, limit new support, and interfere with objectivity and non-partisanship (as an organization).

1 Summary of Policy

SEEDS' Board, supporters, and staff shall not take positions claiming to be of the organization in conflict with this Sensitive Topics Policy.

A sensitive topic is one where the community may be unsettled or contentious, and SEEDS taking a position is likely to impact the organization's standing with parts of its community. This policy and process is especially important to use when the Board's sentiment on the topic isn't initially clear or there is reluctance to change the organization's status quo.

SEEDS supporters may propose positions on sensitive topics. The SEEDS Board shall evaluate and, if appropriate, recommend positions on sensitive topics. The SEEDS Board shall use the *Application for Proposed* to evaluate proposed positions and apply the guidelines in this policy.

2 Values & Principles

In 2008, a group committed to local renewable energy infrastructure, promoting energy efficiency, and advocating for sustainable living in our region formed SEEDS (Sustainable Energy Education & Development Support). Providing training and education on these topics remains a core focus for SEEDS.

In developing this policy on sensitive topics, the organization's values and principles provide context for the policy.

- SEEDS commits to addressing sensitive issues related to our mission in a manner that is respectful of the opinions and positions of others.
- SEEDS commits to looking at all sides of sensitive issues.
- SEEDS understands that there are many sides to all issues, and that just because someone disagrees on an issue, it does not mean that he/she is ignorant or has bad intentions.
- SEEDS believes in a "fact-based" approach to issues and will promote education on sensitive issues.
- SEEDS commits to remaining non-partisan; however, we will engage in the political arena in order to support mission-specific issues.

3 SENSITIVE TOPICS PROCEDURE

Any current SEEDS supporter may propose an official, organizational position by completing and filing an *Application*. One or more supporters may collectively submit a proposal. The Proposing supporter shall be deemed the Advocate or the Advocates if more than one supporter submits the proposal. The proposal shall be deemed the Proposed Position Application (*Application*).

1. The Advocate submits the completed Application with supporting information to the Board.
2. The Board shall acknowledge receipt of the Application in writing within 31 days or within ten days of a Board Meeting, whichever is shorter.
3. The Board shall review the Application for compliance with the Application Procedures within 60 days of receipt. The Board shall notify the Advocate of any non-compliance with the Application Procedure and return the incomplete Application to the Advocate with basic information about the non-compliance. The Advocate may cure the defects and re-submit the Application, which shall be considered a new Application.
4. The Board shall evaluate a completed Application within 180 days of receipt. The Board may
    a. Decline to take further action on the Application and shall notify the Advocate in writing of the action and reasons for the action;
    b. Schedule the Application for discussions prior to taking further action by the Board;[1]
    c. Decide by consent and consistent with the By-Laws whether to formally adopt the Application as a position of SEEDS; or
    d. Recommend the Application for action at the next Annual Meeting along with guidelines for consideration consistent with the sociocratic model and the By-Laws.
5. The action by or at the direction of the Board in Step 4 is final. However, an Advocate may submit a new Application.

[1] After debate, the Board may decline or recommend for action at a member meeting.

4 APPLICATION FOR PROPOSED POSITION

SEEDS does not require a specific format for an Application.

The Application must be

1. Legible
2. Easily readable (sixth grade reading level)
3. Organized
4. Materially Complete
5. Only one, concise topic
6. In paper or electronic format (PDF or Word)
7. Contain a cover page stating that this is an Application for *Proposed Position*, the date submitted, the name or names of the person or persons submitting the Application, the topic and proposed position (in fifteen words or less)
8. No more than 5,000 words in length including supporting charts, data, etc.
9. Clearly watermarked or clearly labelled on each page "PROPOSED POSITION"
10. Have each page numbered sequentially

An *Application for Proposed* must include:

1. An executive summary of no more than 500 words summarizing the topic, the position, and the salient risks.
2. The proposed position in a concise statement.
3. Relevant background on the topic sufficient to support the proposed position
4. A concise benefit analysis of how the proposed position directly fits SEEDS' mission, looking at how the position enhances SEEDS' purpose, supporters, or community
5. A concise analysis of how the topic uniquely and directly affects northeastern Pennsylvania
6. A risk analysis looking at other perspectives on the topic (including conflicting perspectives); identifying potential opposition to the position; assessing potential risks to SEEDS of taking the position; and effects on, maintaining a non-partisan mission, and enhancing community effectiveness
7. Data, relevant to northeastern Pennsylvania, to support the position.
8. Contact information and signature for each person submitting the Application including full name, address, email, and telephone. If more than one supporter applies, each must sign the Application.